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ABSTRACT

Object relations theory holds that a constant and reciprocal interaction exists between past and present interpersonal dealings which, in turn, influence the development of representations. Such representations help individuals assimilate and understand immediate experiences. This paper examines the findings of recent empirical studies designed to assess object relations functioning in sexually abused individuals. Review of the literature revealed problems concerning consistent definitions of abuse and the challenges of memory. Some trends emerged which point to the types of object relations deficits and disruptions that resulted from abuse. Sexual abuse appeared to hinder the structural development of object relations. Two processes that may be disrupted by sexual abuse are: (1) the differentiation of self from other; and (2) the developmental awareness of others as separate with unique and complex characteristics. Furthermore, the victims' affective world seems to be largely colored by malevolent expectations. Other individuals are seen as hostile and threatening, and these affective experiences are internalized and incorporated into the object representations; intimacy and trust in these situations are tenuous at best. Because the issues here are difficult to define and understand, more research is needed to assess the sensitivity and validity of the measures currently available. Contains 39 references. (RJM)

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THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON OBJECT RELATIONS: A REVIEW OF RECENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

by

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THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON OBJECT RELATIONS: A REVIEW OF RECENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Psychology

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by

Brenda Gail Rolls

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON OBJECT RELATIONS: A REVIEW OF RECENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

by

Brenda Gail Rolls

This literature review surveyed recent empirical studies relating to the assessment of object relations functioning in sexually abused females. Projective instruments are used most frequently, including the Rorschach and TAT. Some objective measures, such as the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory are also utilized to make inferences about the internal representational world of respondents. Four dimensions of object relations were examined: structural development, affective quality, relatedness/intimacy level, and perceptual accuracy. Results of research revealed significant trends toward impairment in object relations in sexually abused participants.

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THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON OBJECT RELATIONS: A REVIEW OF RECENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Introduction

Sexual abuse has gained increasing attention as a factor in various psychological disturbances and relational difficulties. Extensive research has been conducted to examine the external variables and behavioral manifestations of the sequelae of such abuse. More recently, attention has been directed toward understanding the impact of sexual abuse on the internal, mediating variables that comprise the object relational world.

Object relations theory studies how people attach and separate from others as a function of their unconscious self-other representations and schemata (Arcaya & Gerber, 1990). General theories of object relations propose that "in some way crucial exchanges with others... are internalized and so come to shape subsequent attitudes, reactions, [and] perceptions" (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p. 11). The internal representations are constructed by children from their actual experiences with and perceptions of their caretakers, or attachment figures, as the latter relate to them, and are organized into intrapsychic images of the self and others. These images are associated with emotions and impulses determined by the quality of the individual's early interpersonal experiences (Horner, 1991). The affect state is an essential element of the relationship with the object. In fact, Kernberg (1976) considers painful and pleasurable affects to be the major organizers of good and bad internalized object relations. The attachment figure

ideally provides protection, soothing, comfort, and help, leading to physical security in the very young, and also to the experience of emotional security and well-being in later development (Rosenstein, Horowitz, Steidl, & Overton, 1992).

The term object relations represents a number of different functions and structures: for instance, ways of representing people in relationships, interpersonal wishes, affects, and conflicts; ways of attributing causes of other people's behavior; and capacity for investing in relationships (Westen, 1991). Most object relations theorists posit a developmental continuum beginning from a need-gratifying pattern of emotional investment in people whereby relationships with others are valued primarily for the gratification, security, or benefits they afford. Further along the developmental continuum are mature object relations which are based on mutual love, respect, and concern for others who are valued for their specific attributes (Westen, 1991). Three developmental phenomena are common to various object relations theories. First is the premise that the development of representations is characterized by increasing differentiation across objects, through which the points of view of self and others are gradually more clearly distinguished. Second, object representations gradually become more complex and integrated as children mature. Third, young children tend to split their representations of people by affective valence, and object relations maturity brings the ability for both older children and adults to integrate more complex, ambivalent, or multivalent representations (Westen, 1991).

Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) described the common denominator of different object relations theories as centering on the observation that "people react to and interact with not only an actual other but also an internal other, a psychic representation of a person which in itself has the power to influence both the individual's affective states and his overt behavioral reactions" (p.10). Put

another way, "internal object relations function as a kind of template that determines one's feelings, beliefs, expectations, fears, wishes, and emotions with respect to important interpersonal relationships" (Horner, 1991, p. 8). Thus, the internal object world provides the schemata from which individuals perceive the world. Object relations theory holds that a constant and reciprocal interaction exists between past and present interpersonal dealings and the development of representations (Arcaya & Gerber, 1990). These representations serve as ways of assimilating and making sense of immediate experience.

This paper will examine the findings of recent empirical studies designed to assess object relations functioning in sexually abused individuals. Specifically, the impact of sexual abuse on structural development of object relations, affective quality of object relations, capacity for relatedness and intimacy represented in object relations, and perceptual accuracy of object relations will be examined. While a division has been made between these aspects of object relations functioning for the convenience of exploration, these components are part of a whole. Clearly, there are interactive dynamics and interdependent relationships between these aspects that contribute to the internal representational world and its functioning.

Methodological Considerations

In examining this body of research, several methodological limitations and concerns must be considered. One limiting factor in this literature review is the lack of a consistent definition of sexual abuse across studies. The various definitions used generally include some type of inappropriate sexual experience with a person who is at least 5 years older than the victim and/or where there is a clear power differential. Still, there is a high degree of variance between

definitions which makes it difficult to compare studies. Specific definitions will be elaborated in the context of each study.

Inherent Limitations

Several methodological limitations are inherent in this type of research. First, many studies use retrospective recollection to gain information about abuse experiences. The validity of this data is often questionable and difficult to verify. Second, there is a wide range of experiences that are considered abusive, and no specific means by which to assess the impact of each varying degree of abuse. For instance, it is likely that actual penetration is more traumatic than fondling, but such distinctions are not easily accounted for in the research data or with diagnostic tools. Further, individual differences between abuse victims impact the degree to which the abuse experiences effect the internal structures. For individuals with strong coping resources and a relatively high level of ego functioning, the impact may be less detrimental than for individuals whose coping resources are more limited.

Another factor is the degree of support and the atmosphere in the home environment at the time of abuse. Where there is a chaotic, distressing family environment and little support, the abuse may have more severe consequences. A family with unstable or chaotic patterns of living can itself be a source of distress. A similar concern relates to a variety of abuse characteristics such as relationship of abuser to the victim, age of onset, duration of abuse, and frequency of abuse. While some researchers make attempts to isolate these factors, it is difficult to measure specific factors without considering the totality of the world of the victim and the subjective context within which the abuse occurred.

Research Participants

In assessing the various implications of the results of the studies reviewed here, there are factors that limit generalizability. One factor relates to the various participant pools. Some studies used children and some adults; some studies used inpatient populations, some outpatient clinical populations, and some non-clinical samples. A range in socioeconomic status (SES), racial identification, and educational level, and participation in psychotherapy are also represented in this body of literature. While some researchers included comparison or control groups, others did not have these available.

Measures

The assessment of object relations functioning also presents some inherent difficulties. Because of the internal and intangible nature of object relations, there are no measures that directly illuminate the internal world. In many ways this type of assessment with standardized measures is in its infancy. While there are many researchers diligently working to develop adequate and sensitive measures, it appears that the actual efficacy of current tools is somewhat unknown. In some studies where non-significant results were found, it may be that the scales used to measure differences in mental representations of sexually and physically abused girls may not have been sensitive enough to distinguish the nature of their object relations, especially those that may be more subtle disturbances (Stovall & Craig, 1990). Further, many of the current tools are subjective in nature and thus lend themselves to variance in scoring and interpretations. Psychometric information concerning reliability and validity is limited as well. The current tools available may represent a good beginning in researchers' attempts to operationally define and measure object relations functioning.

Instrumentation

Researchers and clinicians often use projective tools to access object relations phenomena, or objective measures from which the internal object world may be inferred. The hypothesis underlying projective testing suggests that the way in which an individual perceives and responds to test material will reflect fundamental aspects of his or her psychological functioning (Anastasi, 1988). Further, projective assessment implies a point of view that suggests that "the subject actively and spontaneously structures unstructured material, and in so doing reveals his structuring principles--which are the principles of his psychological structure" (Rapaport, Gill, & Schafer, cited in Ornduff, Freedenfeld, Kelsey, & Critelli, 1994). A brief review of the tools most frequently used in the present studies reviewed will provide a context from which to explore the results.

Rorschach Inkblot Test

Blatt and Lerner (1983) discussed the theoretical foundations that contribute to the Rorschach's usefulness as a tool for measuring object representations. According to these authors, the study of the representation of the human form on the Rorschach provides a solid data base for assessing an individual's representational world including the conception of self, others, and the actual and potential interactions between the two. Human responses are suggested to be manifestations of object representations in both structure and content. The Rorschach is considered particularly appropriate for assessing object representations since attributions made to an essentially ambiguous stimulus are presumed to be shaped by the organizing characteristics of the internal representational world (Blatt & Lerner). Several different approaches are used by researchers to assess object representations from Rorschach responses.

Traditional Rorschach Variables. DeSousa, (1993) delineated the traditional variables extracted from Exner's (1986) Comprehensive System that are utilized to assess object relations. These include all Human content responses, such as whole human responses, coded H; human detail responses, coded Hd; whole fictional or mythological detail responses, coded (H); and fictional or mythological human detail responses, coded (Hd). According to DeSousa, these scores are characterized as healthy when there are no form quality distortions, no Morbid or Aggressive content scores, and no special scores. If any of these are present or there is poor form quality, the responses are characterized as spoiled. Human movement responses, coded M, were also recorded as healthy or spoiled in accordance with the same criteria. Morbid content responses, coded MOR, Aggressive content responses, coded AG, and Cooperative Movement responses, coded COP, may be utilized to infer the perceptions and affective expectations of interpersonal relationships, and thus internal representations. The Coping Deficit Index is also examined to assess the degree of distress and available resources.

Developmental Analysis of the Concept of the Object Scale (DACOS). The DACOS (Blatt & Lerner, 1983) is a comprehensive system for assessing object representations that calls for scoring human responses according to the following six developmental principles:

1. Differentiation: types of figures perceived including H, Hd, (H), (Hd).

2. Articulation: number and types of perceptual and functional features attributed to the figures.

3. Motivation: degree of internality in the motivation of action ranging from unmotivated, reactive, to intentional.

4. Integration: degree of integration of object and action ranging from fused, incongruent, nonspecific, to congruent.

5. Content: content of the action is scored as malevolent or benevolent.

6. Interaction: nature of the interaction with another object ranging from active-passive, active-reactive, active-active.

In each of the six categories, responses with human content are scored along a developmental continuum. The developmental level of object representations can be assessed for each of these six categories and as a composite. In a longitudinal study of normal development (Blatt, Wild, & Ritzler, 1976), results revealed a correlation between increasing age and number of full human figures that were accurately perceived and well-articulated, and described as being involved in appropriate, integrated, positive and constructive or benevolent interactions. Similar studies (Blatt, Brenneis, Schimek, & Glick; and Blatt, Schimek, & Brenneis; cited in Blatt & Lerner, 1983) found that a hospitalized sample of adolescents and young adults described human figures that were significantly more inaccurately perceived, distorted, and partial, and that were seen as inert or engaged in unmotivated, incongruent, nonspecific, and malevolent activity in comparison with responses of non-clinical respondents. Interrater reliability on DACOS ranges from 75% to 96% (DeSousa, 1993).

Mutuality of Autonomy (MOA) Scale. This scale was developed (Urist, 1977; Urist & Shill 1982) to asses thematic elements of object relations in responses on the Rorschach by analyzing all responses containing stated or implied interactions between people, animals, and objects. Each point on a 7-point scale refers to developmentally significant gradations in the move toward autonomy on the separation-individuation continuum. Percepts depicting relationships characterized by a lack of differentiation or an imbalance of power are considered to suggest developmentally primitive, unhealthy object relations. Percepts that depict figures in a reciprocal and mutually autonomous relationships are

interpreted as suggesting high-level object representation. Also derived from this scale are the highest object relations score (HORS) which represents the single most adaptive score, and the lowest object relations score (LORS) which represents the single most disturbed score. Interrater reliability consistently falls within the 70% to 90% range (DeSousa, 1993).

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

Westen, Lohr, Silk, Kerber, and Goodrich (cited in Westen, 1991) developed a set of measures called the Object Relations and Social Cognition Scale (ORSCS) that can be applied to TAT responses for the purpose of assessing object relations. The coding system provides an index to measure the maturity level of the object world on four object relations dimensions using a 5-point scale. The TAT is a particularly good test for assessing object relations because the cards represent social interactions, and respondents are believed to provide enough detail in describing characters and relationships that interpersonal functioning in intimate relationships can be accurately inferred (Westen). In describing characters and social circumstances depicted in the cards, respondents can provide data regarding how they make sense of and experience relationships and people. Since sexual abuse takes place in the context of relationships, often significant relationships, the TAT can be a valuable source of information (Freedenfeld, 1992). In a normal sample, the four TAT scales have largely been shown to correlate with other object relations measures. For a review of these studies the reader is referred to Barends, Westen, Byers, Leigh, and Silbert (1990); and Blatt, Wein, Chevron, and Quinlan (1979). The measures devised for use with the TAT assess the four dimensions of object relations discussed below.

The Complexity of Representations of People (CR) scale assesses the extent to which a subject clearly differentiates the perspectives of self and others,

recognizes the complexity of personality characteristics, and understands the subjective nature of experience of self and others. At the lowest level, respondents have difficulty distinguishing people and perspectives. At the highest levels, respondents manifest a complex understanding of the nature, expression, and context of personality and subjective experience (Westen, 1991).

Affect-Tone of Relationship Paradigms (AT) scale assesses the extent to which the person expects relationships to be destructive and threatening or safe and enriching. While maturity on the other scales is believed to develop with age, this scale is not presumed to develop with age from perceptions of malevolence to benevolence. At the lowest levels, respondents attribute malevolence to characters in the story, whereas at higher levels, they view relationships as more benign and pleasurable (Westen, 1991).

The Capacity for Emotional Investment in Relationships and Moral Standards (CEI) scale reflects a developmental model aimed at integrating cognitive-developmental theories with object relations theory and clinical observation (Westen, 1991). At the lowest level, people are viewed primarily as instruments for gratification and providing security. At the highest level, the person is capable of forming deep, committed relationships wherein self and other are treated as ends rather than means, and each is valued for their unique qualities. In this stage the person moves toward autonomy within the context of real involvement with and investment in others (Westen).

The Understanding of Social Causality (USC) scale assesses the logic, complexity, and accuracy of attributions. At the lowest levels, causality is illogical or alogical, with confused, inappropriate, highly unlikely, or absent attributions of interpersonal phenomena. At the highest levels, respondents manifest an

understanding of the way complex psychological processes are involved in the generation of thoughts, feelings, and actions (Westen, 1991).

In scoring the TAT responses, it is typical for each story to be typed on a separate page and coded independently by two raters on each of the four scales. All responses are typically rated one scale at a time. Raters are kept blind as to the abuse status of each subject. Reliability measures for the scales were as follows: CR, r = .82; AT, r = .93; CEI, r = .90; USC, r = .85 (Ornduff et al., 1994).

Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI)

The underlying assumption of the BORRTI is that the developmental level of ego functioning may be discerned from the way in which individuals conduct their relationships and the way self is experienced in relation to others (Bell, Billington, & Becker, cited in Frank, 1992). The BORRTI (Bell, 1989, cited in Frank) is a 45-item questionnaire where the respondent answers true or false to each item. Measures on four object relations subscales and three reality testing subscales are extracted from responses. Frank provided test-retest reliability coefficients for each of the four object relations subscales with a time difference of four weeks as follows: ALN, r = .88; IA, r = .73; EGC, r = .90; SI, r = .58. Below is a summary of the BORRTI subscales, also provided by Frank.

Elevations on the Alienation (ALN) subscale reflect a lack of basic trust in relationships, an inability to attain closeness, and a sense of hopelessness about maintaining a stable and satisfying level of intimacy. Individuals with high scores are likely to be suspicious, guarded, have superficial social relationships, and no real sense of connection or belonging. Anger and hostile withdrawal are common, and empathy is limited. Elevations on ALN are most commonly are found in patients with borderline character pathology, and are virtually never seen in high-functioning intact individuals.

Elevations on the Insecure Attachment (IA) subscale reflect painfulness of interpersonal relations. A high score indicates the respondent is likely to be very sensitive to rejection and easily hurt by others, and may demonstrate excessive concerns about being liked and accepted by others. Relationships are likely characterized by sadomasochistic binds and expectations of abandonment. When coupled with elevations on the Alienation scale, this represents the most frequent profile among borderline patients, and suggests both mistrust and lack of intimacy, but with frequent involvement in unstable and painful relationships.

Elevations on the Egocentricity (EGC) subscale suggest that the motivations of others are mistrusted, that others are perceived to exist only in relation to oneself, and that others are to be manipulated for one's own self-centered aims. High scores reflect a tendency to take a self-protective and exploitative attitude toward relationships, and further may indicate tendencies to be intrusive, coercive, demanding, manipulative, and controlling, with little awareness or concern for others' feelings.

Elevations on the Social Incompetence (SI) subscale may indicate shyness, nervousness, and uncertainty about how to interact with members of the opposite sex. Difficulty in establishing friendships may prevail, and there may be a tendency to avoid interpersonal interactions due to excessive anxiety such situations arouse.

Elevations on the Reality Distortion (RD) subscale suggest severe distortions of external and internal reality, though elevations on RD without concurrent elevations on the other reality testing scales do not indicate the presence of psychosis. More typically, elevations on this subscale are seen in individuals with borderline, schizotypal, and paranoid personality disorders, and

in substance abuse populations. High scorers may experience depressive or grandiose beliefs, as well as feelings of vulnerability and helplessness.

Elevations on the Uncertainty of Perception (UP) subscale are commonly associated with elevations on RD, and are most often found in borderline patients and substance abusers. Individuals with high scores tend to experience confusion about their own feelings and the feelings and behaviors of others. They may have poor social judgment, and defend against anxiety with denial and dissociation.

Elevations on the Hallucinations and Delusions (HD) subscale suggest the presence of hallucinatory experiences and paranoid delusions, however, high scores may be associated with idiosyncratic understanding of the test items. Therefore, caution should be exerted in interpreting elevations on this subscale.

The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT)

The SCT is a projective assessment measure developed by Loevinger, Wessler, and Redmore (cited in Jennings & Armsworth, 1992) that taps seven stages and three transitional phases of ego development. In this context, the ego is viewed as the organizing trait of the personality and determines how an individual frames, attributes meaning to, and interprets the interpersonal world. The seven stages and three phases range from the most primitive where the task is to construct a differentiated self to the Integrated Stage where a person is attaining self-actualization, resolving any ambivalence regarding autonomy of self and others, and developing an increasing capacity for tolerating ambiguity. The format consists of 36 sentence stems that the subject completes and is believed to elicit the subject's perceptual frame of reference. The SCT has interrater reliability of .85 (Loevinger & Wessler, cited in Jennings & Armsworth).

Dimensions of Object Relations

The dimensions of object relations examined in this body of literature tended to separate into four general categories which also represent four significant theoretical aspects of object relations functioning. Research results will be discussed in accordance with these categories which are as follows: structural development; affective quality of object relations; relatedness and intimacy level of object relations; and perceptual accuracy of object relations. In each category a brief description will be provided before an examination of the research. Results will be reviewed starting with the Rorschach and TAT, and then other measures as applicable.

Structural Development

The first dimension to be examined pertains to structural development of the internal world. The structural aspects of object relations focus primarily on the internal world as it is constructed through experiences in early relationships. Structural development refers to the extent to which the internal representations are differentiated, including the perception of self and others as complex and multidimensional. At a more mature level, the self and other images are experienced as separate; this separation allows an individual to appreciate different perspectives of self and other. At a less mature level there may be fusion between the images and less capacity to discern different perspectives. Further, the degree of structural maturation also impacts the capacity to understand complex characteristics that motivate behaviors and interactions.

Rorschach. DeSousa (1993) conducted a study to investigate differences between the internal representational worlds of sexually abused and non-abused children. Only cases where there had been genital contact by a perpetrator who was at least 5-years older and who was well-known to the child were included.

The study consisted of a sexually abused group of participants and a non-abused comparison group. The abuse group consisted of 87 African American females, ages 6-16, of predominantly low SES with a documented history of sexual abuse. Subjects were tested as part of a longitudinal study conducted at a hospital in Chicago. These data were obtained during the second year of the study, with current instruments administered from 9 to 18 months after the initial disclosure of abuse. The comparison group consisted of 30 African American females matched for age and other demographic factors who had no prior history of sexual or physical abuse, chronic illness, or significant psychological problems.

Measures were obtained using the Rorschach and the TAT. Information specific to the abuse such as duration, number of incidents, type of abuse, and relationship of perpetrator to child was gathered via an interview with the abused participants and their mothers or guardians.

The Rorschach was administered and scored in accordance with Exner's (1986) Comprehensive System. Object relations were assessed using traditional variables, DACOS scores, and MOA scores. In the analyses of results, the variable of family composition was introduced as a blocking factor when statistically significant differences emerged between sexually abused and comparison groups, or between maternally supported and unsupported groups, or any other variables which were found to be related to family composition. This was done because family composition (i.e. intact family, single-parent family, foster family placement) correlated with performance on the dependent measures.

Results indicated there was a nonsignificant trend wherein abused girls gave more total Human responses ($M = 3.931$) than did non-abused girls ($M = 2.50$), $t(53.9) = 2.414$, $p = .019$.) Abused respondents had more healthy human responses, more spoiled human responses and more Quasi-human responses in

their protocols than the non-abused girls. Abused girls also had more Human Movement and spoiled Human Movement responses than did non-abused girls.

Analyses of the DACOS scales revealed only one score that differentiated abused from non-abused girls. Sexually abused girls scored higher than non-abused girls on the Motivation subscale with inaccurate responses. For the MOA measures, the non-abused group had lower (more adaptive) mean scores than did the sexually abused group. Also, there was a trend for non-abused girls to have lower Most Adaptive Scores (MORS) than abused girls. The investigator noted that results must be interpreted with caution because many of the Rorschach protocols had fewer than fourteen responses which might have contributed to the failure to detect significant differences between groups.

Leifer, Shapiro, Martone, and Kassem, (1991) conducted another study in the same longitudinal research project as DeSousa (1993). These researchers also used the Rorschach to assess the psychological functioning of a group of sexually abused girls. Subjects included 79 African American females ages 5 to 16 who had a documented history of sexual abuse. Like DeSousa, this study included only respondents molested by persons who were well known to them, only cases where some form of genital touching had occurred, and cases where the perpetrator was at least 5-years older than the victim. Testing took place between one week and six months following disclosure. A comparison group comprised of 32 African American girls with no known history of sexual abuse was recruited from the medical patients at the hospital and was matched by age with a randomly selected subset of the abuse sample.

Rorschach protocols were scored using Exner's (1986) Comprehensive system. Supplementary measures included the Elizur (cited in Leifer et al., 1991) Rorschach Content Test Anxiety and Hostility Scales, the MOA Scale (Urist, 1977;

Urist & Shill, 1982), and the Barrier and Penetration Scales (Fisher & Cleveland, 1968). Abuse data were taken from records of investigative interviews with children, medical charts, and caretakers' reports. With the Elizur Rorschach Content Test Anxiety and Hostility Scale, hostility is scored if the behavior of the precept figure suggests hostility, if the response symbolizes hostility, or if objects of aggression are present. Fisher and Cleveland (1968) developed the Barrier and Penetration Scales to assess the extent of sexual preoccupation and personal body concerns, as well as the perception of definitive body boundaries on Rorschach responses. Barrier responses are those in which the boundaries of objects are emphasized. Penetration responses are those emphasizing the penetrability of boundaries.

Results showed a general trend in support of the hypothesis that the Rorschach responses of the abused girls would exhibit higher levels of psychological disturbance compared to controls. The two groups were differentiated on the MOA scale where they showed no difference in HORS, but a significant difference for the lowest level responses LORS did emerge. The abused girls' percepts were characterized by more primitive, disturbed relations between figures. Further, the abused girls did exhibit more bodily concerns than the non-abused group.

Isler (1992) also explored the effects of sexual abuse on object relations functioning by using the MOA Scale (Urist, 1977) to score the Rorschach protocols of 63 abused children and 60 non-abused clinical controls matched for age and SES. The results of this study did not reveal any significant differences between the two groups.

Thematic Apperception Test. Freedenfeld (1992) conducted a study using the ORSCS for the TAT to examine the maturity level of object relations in female

children. Sexual abuse was defined as a wanted or unwanted sexual experience with an individual at least 5-years older, and included contact and noncontact abuse. Participants were 38 children with a documented history of sexual abuse and a clinical comparison group of 26 children with no documented history of abuse. Groups did not differ significantly in regards to age or demographics. Responses to five TAT cards were examined. To analyze data, mean scores were calculated by averaging the scores between the two trained raters and across cards for each subject. Results indicated significant differences existed between the two groups with the abuse group obtaining lower mean scores on scale CR (M = 2.18, SD = 0.34 abused; M = 2.39, SD = 0.43 non-abused; t = 2.15, $p < .05$). As predicted, the percentage of Level-1 scores on scale CR was significantly higher for the abuse group (M = 7.90, SD = 12.98 abused; M = 4.60, SD = 4.64 non-abused; t = 2.77, $p < .01$).

While the researcher did report significant results, there were some limitations of the study that must be considered when interpreting the data. The data used were archival which might sacrifice validity. For instance, a lack of sufficient prompting by TAT administrators could have limited the amount of data obtained in children's responses, and thus may not have evoked robust responses that would indicate more primitive or more mature development. The TAT stories used were not obtained from the same five cards, and thus the lack of a consistent protocol could have impacted results. Also, the comparison group was a clinical sample, and though there was no documented history of abuse, it is likely that these children had other factors impacting them that could have effected the object relations measures. Similarly, the researcher assumed that the abused participants had no histories of other forms of trauma, though the

environment in which sexual abuse could occur could also be conducive to other kinds of abuse (Freedenfeld, 1992).

Ornduff et al. (1994) compared TAT responses of 17 sexually abused and 25 non-abused female children between the ages of 5 and 16. The two groups were comparable in age, IQ levels, and SES status. The investigators defined sexual abuse as any wanted or unwanted sexual experience, including contact and noncontact events, with an individual at least 5 years older. Data used in this study were archival in nature and included responses to TAT cards 1, 2, 3BM, and 17BM. Object relations were assessed from responses using the ORSCS, and mean composite scores for each group were computed to provide an overall measure of level of object relations development. These composites were adjusted to partial out any effects of age or verbal productivity (i.e., number of words per story) on the scores.

Results indicated that overall object relations scores (averaged across the four scales) were significantly lower in the abuse group (adjusted $M = 2.14$) than in the non-abused group (adjusted $M = 2.37$), $F(1, 37) = 7.03$, $p < .01$. The researchers also tabulated the frequency of Level-1 scores for each scale. Overall frequency of Level-1 scores was significantly higher in the abuse group (adjusted $M = 1.71$) than in the non-abused group (adjusted $M = 1.14$), $F(1, 38) = 7.66$, $p < .01$. Group differences were most pronounced by the tendency of abuse respondents to form more primitive and pathological representations than non-abused comparison respondents.

In DeSousa's (1993) study, the researcher examined TAT responses of the sexually abused and non-abused comparison groups using the ORSCS. Only one TAT story was elicited, though the researcher noted this may be sufficient to detect significant group differences. Card 7GF (mother figure and girl holding

doll) was chosen to maximize the potential for eliciting interpersonal content (DeSousa, 1993). The four ORSCS scales yielded four scores for each subject. The absence or presence of Level One responses on each scale was coded and analyzed to provide a fifth score. Sexually abused girls scored significantly lower than non-abused girls on the CR scale. This suggests a deficit in the ability to clearly differentiate the perspectives of self and others, and to perceive self and others as separate and complex individuals with multidimensional motives and characteristics. The CR scale is believed to be developmental in nature (change over time). These results suggest sexual abuse may cause an arrest or regression in the object relational developmental process along this dimension.

Stovall and Craig (1990) used the TAT and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale to examine the mental representations and self-concept of 20 sexually abused, 20 physically abused and 20 non-abused but distressed females between the ages of 7 and 12 years with no significant between-group differences in age or IQ. The two abused groups consisted of children who had a documented record of abuse, while the distressed group was comprised of participants who were in family or individual psychotherapy. The investigators defined sexual abuse as any involvement between developmentally immature and dependent children in sexual activities to which they could not give informed consent or could not fully comprehend. In this study, only cases where the perpetrator was the primary caretaker such as mother, father, stepparent, or paternal boyfriend or girlfriend were included. Further, the sexual abuse had to involve genital-oral or anal or vaginal penetration, without aggression or physical violence.

Five TAT cards (Cards 1, 2, 4, 7GF, and 13) were administered and scored using Taylor and Franzen's (cited in Stovall & Craig, 1990) Internalized Object Relations Scale , and Aron's (cited in Stovall & Craig) scale. The Internalized

Object Relations Scale uses two scales to objectively score thematic material, and separate subscales designed to assess different formal and content dimensions of object representations. Scores range from 1 to 5 on each subscale, with 1 reflecting poorly developed object relations and 5 reflecting well-developed object relations. Subscales include Image of the Self in Interaction with the Other, Complexity of Object Representation, Images of Others, and Quality of the Self-Other in Relationship. Aron (cited in Stovall & Craig) developed a scale to measure aggression as experienced by the self and perceived in others, and also measures abasement as experienced by the self. One point is given if the TAT story includes the presence of the variable, a 0 if it is absent. Dimensions of aggression experienced by the self include Physical, Coercive-Restraining, Verbal, and Passive; dimensions of abasement include Submissive-Intragressive and Intragressive.

The results indicated that the sexually abused participants were more likely to describe others non-psychologically in terms of actions and behaviors. Their representations of others were typically described with less specificity and complexity and were less frequently seen as well functioning or intact. Interactions were also relatively more likely to be experienced as transient, temporary, and impersonal.

The researchers concluded that the mental representations of abused children are significantly different from non-abused children, and attributed this difference to abuse experiences and not to the distress of a chaotic home environment. However, the sexually abused children were more likely to have positive conscious images of self and others, whereas their unconscious perceptions revealed quite disturbed perceptions of self and others. Children from distressed homes showed congruence in these perceptions. This suggests

that abused children tend to split off more negative perceptions and these perceptions remain unconscious and thus not available for conscious thought. Perhaps this is an indication of an inability to integrate good and bad into a cohesive self-representation.

Other Measures. Jennings and Armsworth (1992) conducted a study to examine whether differing levels of ego development could be determined between women with a history of incest or sexual abuse and women with no abuse history. Incest and sexual abuse were defined as self-reports of experience(s) in childhood (0-12 years old) or adolescence (13-18 years old) of any form of sexual activity between a subject and a parent, stepparent, sibling, extended family member, surrogate parent, adult acquaintance, or stranger. Sexual experiences were considered abusive if there were 5 or more years age difference and there was a clear power differential between the subject and reported perpetrator. Sexual activities reported included genital exposure by the perpetrator, intimate kissing, fondling, masturbation of the perpetrator's genitals, mutual masturbation, fellatio, cunnilingus, and vaginal or rectal penetrations.

Participants were 60 women drawn from a larger community sample of university students, community college students, women's groups and selected cooperating volunteers. Each group had thirty participants and were comparable in age and demographics. The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT) was used to measure levels of ego development.

No significant difference was found between developmental level of the ego and a history of sexual abuse. In fact, in this study sexually abused respondents generally exhibited healthier egos than did non-abused respondents (Jennings and Armsworth, 1992). While this finding was unexpected, it does

demonstrate how individual differences, coping resources, and ego structure can impact the sequelae of sexual abuse.

In a qualitative study, Kinzl and Biebl (1992) proceeded from the hypothesis that traumatic experiences of childhood sexual abuse would lead to specific deficits in ego development. To test this hypothesis the investigators obtained biographic histories of 165 female inpatients ranging in age from 17 to 44 years. All patients were interviewed in depth regarding experiences of major childhood trauma. Whenever the suspicion of incestuous abuse arose, the collection of data was expanded by addressing specific questions in a semistructured, in-depth interview. Questions focused on sexual history; situation before and when incestuous abuse started; life events at the onset of mental disorder; type, duration, and frequency of incestuous abuse; coping strategies and defense mechanisms; social and sexual behavior as well as relationships since the incest.

The researchers reported that 20% of the patients interviewed were deemed to have undoubtedly experienced sexual abuse during childhood. In the analyses of their findings, the researchers indicated that this group of patients clearly showed that situations connected with imagined, impending, or real separations were experienced as labilizing. This may be interpreted as an indication of immature object relations since the self and other are not differentiated, and the anticipation of loss became disruptive to the sense of self.

Affective Quality of Object Relations

The second dimension to be considered is the affective quality of object relations. Internal object representations have a strong affective component. In fact, it is theorized that early affective experiences significantly determine the affective quality of the object world as these experiences are internalized and

affective attributions are made to internal representations (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). The emotional characteristics carried by the internal objects are believed to determine the affective expectations with which an individual approaches interpersonal situations and the world at large. At the extremes, a person may perceive the world as safe and nurturing, or destructive and threatening depending on the quality of early attachments and the affective valence attributed to internal self and other images.

Rorschach. The results of DeSousa's (1993) study indicated that sexual abuse not only had a significant impact on maturity level of object relations, but also impacted the affective quality object relations. As noted previously, abused girls in this study had significantly higher mean scores on the MOA scale than non-abused girls, and sexually abused girls tended to have higher MORS than non-abused girls (both scores indicating greater disturbance). The perception of imbalance of power in such MOA scores represents a perception of a more malevolent object world (DeSousa). Thus, it appears that the experience of child sexual abuse is associated with internal representations of self, others and relationships in the object world as more malevolent and destructive. However, the investigator also concluded that the experience of sexual abuse does not destroy positive object representations in the internal world or eliminate the ability to perceive the object world in a healthy way. Sexual abuse does introduce the likelihood of the child internalizing negative object representations and then sometimes perceiving the object world in a much more malevolent way than would be likely if sexual abuse had not occurred.

The investigator also cautioned that, although some internalization of the abuse experience may have occurred, these implications may be limited since statistical significance may not translate into clinical significance. The mean

scores for both the sexually abused and comparison groups fell within the adaptive range of scores, though abused girls did exhibit a greater range of scores and less consistency in their perceptions (DeSousa, 1993).

Further evidence of the negative effects of sexual abuse on affective quality of object relations was provided in the study by Leifer et al. (1991). The 79 abused girls produced higher scores on the Elizur Rorschach Content Text Anxiety and Hostility scale than the non-abused comparison group ($F(1, 61) = 5.86$, $p < .05$). This pattern of results suggests that sexually abused girls experience disturbed, hostile emotions in regard to relationships. In this study, the abused girls demonstrated significantly more psychological distress than the comparison group as reflected in the preponderance of negative affect produced in their Rorschach protocols. While past research has generally focused on factors external to the child, the findings of this study support the notion that psychological distress experienced by sexually victimized children is significantly related to internal mediating variables.

Thematic Apperception Test. In Freedenfeld's (1992) study of TAT responses of sexually abused female children, the results showed significant differences between the abused group and the non-abused comparison group on the Affect-tone (AT) scale of the ORSCS. As expected, the abused group produced significantly lower mean scores on the AT scale ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.44$ abused; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.60$ non-abused; $t = 3.62$, $p < .001$). Though the abused group did not produce a significantly higher percentage of Level-1 scores on scale AT, the abused group did have a significantly lower percentage of Level-4 and -5 scores than the comparison group ($M = 15.26$, $SD = 18.71$ abused; $M = 29.23$, $SD = 24.65$ non-abused; $t = 2.58$, $p < .01$).

The scores of the abused participants on the AT scale suggest a tendency for abuse victims to develop a malevolent object world and view the external environment in painful and threatening ways. An implication of these findings is that sexually abused individuals come to expect malevolence from the world and their relationships as a result of early abusive experiences. The researcher suggested that while the abuse victims in this study were able to successfully defend against their more pathological (Level-1) responses, they did not have the internal structures necessary to produce responses that were of a more mature level of object relations (Levels-4 and -5).

Henderson (1990), compared the object relations of 56 sexually abused girls with 56 non-abused girls through their representations of characters in TAT stories. The researcher adapted a coding system developed by Dean, Malik, Richards, and Stringer (cited in Henderson) to provide added detail about the child-parent relationships and sexually related issues. This study was designed to examine in depth the object and self representations of sexually abused girls via TAT stories. Participants ranged in age from 4 to 16-years and represented a clinical population. Sexual abuse was defined as sexual contact between a child and an adult that included any of the following: vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse, masturbation of the adult by the child or of the child by the adult, and genital fondling or manipulation. No more than two years had elapsed since the cessation of the abuse. Test materials were twelve TAT cards: 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 5, 6GF, 7GF, 9GF, 10, 12F, 13MF, and 18GF. The researcher examined group differences, and specifically focused on scores reflecting the quality of relationships between the daughter figure of the story and parental figures.

The researcher reported a preponderance of negative over positive affect in both groups. The mother representations in the abused group were characterized

by more hostility, rivalry, and resistance than those of the comparison group. These findings seemingly indicate that the mother-daughter relationship was characterized by a significant amount of hostility, lack of nurturance, and more negative actions in the abused group. Relationships between father and daughter depicted by the abused respondents were more ambivalent, affectionate, and sexualized; it also reflected a greater emphasis on positive action.

The investigator concluded that the abused daughters clearly attributed more hostility, aggression, frustration, and rivalry to their projected maternal representations than their comparison counterparts, and these relationships were judged to be less gratifying than in the comparison group. The father representations of the abused participants represented a potential source of affection, attention, and pleasurable actions, as well as evoking feelings of ambivalence and hostility. For sexually abused girls, the daughter representations in the stories were portrayed as less successful in coping and were evaluated with more negativity than those of the non-abused participants. The self representations also reflected greater felt inadequacy and helplessness in the abused group.

Westen, Ludolph, Block, Wixom, and Wiss (1990) attempted to explore the relationship between developmental history variables and object relations in a sample of psychiatrically disturbed adolescents. Subjects were 36 female adolescents in a psychiatric hospital. Developmental history variables were extracted from each subject's chart and scored by a trained rater. Object relations were assessed from TAT responses using the ORSCS.

The results of this study indicated that sexual abuse had a primary impact on affect tone of relationship paradigms. Sexually abused participants had a more malevolent object world as evidenced by their scores on the AT scale, and there

was a significant correlation between sexual abuse and percentage of Level-1 scores. The researchers suggested that this finding is related to the kind of cognitive disruption and identity disturbance that can result from repeated experience of overwhelming affect such as occurs in sexual abuse. An interesting note made by the researchers was that for these individuals, the sexual abuse occurred primarily in the latency years. The negative impact on object relations suggests that post-Oedipal events may have an important impact on object relations in a way that has been relatively neglected by psychoanalytic theory.

Though these results have important implications, care must be taken in attempting to generalize them. This study was largely exploratory, had a small sample size, and had no comparison group available. Inpatient participants may differ from outpatient participants, which also limits generalizability. Further, developmental history data were obtained by chart review, which imposes clear limitations on the findings. Historical data do not necessarily provide information pertaining to circumstances at the time of abuse such as level of family distress, or other factors that may have been disruptive to object relations functioning and development.

In contrast, DeSousa (1993) found no significant group differences on the AT Scale of the ORSCS between a sexually abused group of children and a non-clinical control group. The researcher did identify a trend wherein abused individuals scored more poorly than individuals in the comparison group. A significant limitation in the veracity of these results is that only one TAT story was used to assess AT.

Other Measures. Silbert (1993) also conducted a study to explore the question of whether women with histories of childhood sexual abuse have more malevolent object worlds and a poorer sense of relatedness than non-abused

women. The respondents for this study were 103 women between the ages of 20 and 56 who volunteered for the project based on advertisements placed in psychotherapy settings and in newsletters for abuse survivors. This sample is not representative of all sexual abuse survivors given that over 90% were Caucasian with the average participant having completed at least some college with annual earnings between $15,500 and $26,000. Further, all respondents reported having had at least four months of psychotherapy.

To assess affect tone of participants' object worlds, two measures were utilized. Silbert's (cited in Silbert, 1993) Affective Object Representations Scale was designed for this study and is a 6-point, 11 item measure of the extent to which others are experienced as malevolent, untrustworthy, exploitive, and selfish. The format asks participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements such as, "most people don't think twice about taking advantage of someone else as long as there is something in it for them" and "people have to look out for themselves because no one else will" (Silbert, pp. 44-45). The researcher reported that test-retest correlation was strong ($r = .90$, $p < .001$) when administered with a two week interval. Norms for the comparison group in this study were compiled from the group of 17 non-abused women who completed this questionnaire in order to establish test-retest reliability.

The second measure was Janoff-Bulman's (cited in Silbert, 1993) benevolence/malevolence subscale of the World Assumptions Scale. This subscale is a 6-point, 8 item measure that assesses the degree to which the personal and impersonal world is experienced as good, kind, and benevolent. Participants are asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "human nature is basically good" (Silbert, p. 45). Reported reliability for this subscale ranges from .66 to .78, and comparison group norms were produced by Janoff-Bulman

from a 1989 study conducted with non-clinical, non-abused college women. A third scale, the BORRTI, was used to measure participants' sense of relatedness and will be discussed in another section of this paper.

Prior to completing the object relations measures, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and an unstructured narrative that requested a description of a memorable event. After the three object relations measures were completed, participants then completed a questionnaire related to sexual abuse history. Participants were also asked whether they had been victimized over age 18 in order to control for the impact of sexual trauma experienced as an adult on the affective quality of object relations.

The results of this research supported the hypothesis that the affective quality of object representations may be at least partially shaped by the experience of sexual abuse. In relation to comparison group norms on the Affective Representations Scale, the mean score for the abused group reflected significantly more malevolent, exploitive, and distrustful responses ($\underline{M}$ = 2.58, $\underline{SD}$ = 0.78; $\underline{M}$ = 3.63, $\underline{SD}$ = 0.88; $\underline{t}$ = 4.57, $\underline{p} < .001$). These results indicate that sexually abused women in this study perceived others as insensitive, exploitive, and ready to betray them. This finding was consistent with the results on the Janoff-Bulman scale as well when mean scores were compared to the comparison group norms. Sexually abused women in this sample gave significantly more malevolent responses to Janoff-Bulman's benevolence/malevolence subscale than the comparison group comprised of non-traumatized women. The abused women were likely to perceive others as more unfriendly, unkind, evil, and selfish than non-abused women. The investigator concluded that sexually abused women's internal representations of others are more malevolent than those of non-sexually abused women's ($\underline{M}$ = 28.96, $\underline{SD}$ = 7.19; $\underline{M}$ = 35.7, $\underline{t}$ = 8.51; $\underline{p} < .0001$).

Nigg, Silk, Westen, Lohr, Gold, Goodrich, and Ogata, (1991) conducted a study to assess object representations with a modified version of Mayman's (1968) Early Memories Test in an attempt to discriminate borderline patients from patients with other diagnoses. The researchers reported that this test has been used in various forms by psychodynamically oriented clinicians, researchers, and others for clinical assessment of object relations, and it is believed to reflect stable characteristics of personality. The use of early memories as projective data for assessing object relations assumes that when individuals reconstruct memories from stored experiences, the incidents they retrieve reflect characteristic ways of experiencing and representing the self, others, and relationships, and that these are acted out in daily interpersonal functioning (Mayman, 1968; Bruhn and Last, cited in Nigg et al., 1991). The memories selected by a subject are believed to reflect cognitive and affective organization of past and present interpersonal experiences. This organization then influences how information about people in the present is processed.

Adult participants were drawn from an inpatient unit and were between the ages of 18 and 60. A non-clinical comparison group was established by recruiting volunteers. One aspect of this study specifically examined the association between reported history of sexual abuse (defined as penetration, fondling or caressing of genitals, or exposure to genitals without physical contact) and affective quality of object representations as determined from the following aspects of the Early Memories Test: 1) accounts involving deliberate injury, 2) effectiveness of helpers in accounts in which injury or illness occurred, 3) affect tone (from malevolent to caring) in the relationships portrayed in the accounts, and 4) accounts that portrayed extremely malevolent interactions. The earliest

and next earliest memories, and earliest memory of mother and of father were included in this report.

Sexual abuse was found to be a significant predictor of affect tone ($t = 2.46$, $df = 47$, $p = .02$). Scores of extreme malevolence were analyzed categorically. Eight respondents (all patients with borderline personality disorder reporting sexual abuse) received extreme malevolence scores, yielding a significant difference between the abused and non-abused patients with borderline personality disorder ($p = .05$). The researchers performed a series of analyses to partial out variables that might have impacted results. Consistently, sexual abuse was the only predictor of affective quality of object representations that reached statistical significance. This study's finding of an association between reported childhood sexual abuse and projective portrayal of injuries and malevolence supports the findings of previous studies and also suggests that some portion of borderline patients' malevolent object world may be linked more specifically to sexual abuse than to the borderline diagnosis (Nigg et al., 1991).

Some limitations of this study should be noted. Data on abuse were retrospective since they were based on memories, and memories may be variable over time. Further, there is no objective way to verify the memories recollected, and the perceptions of these recalled experiences may also shift over time.

Baker, Silk, Westen, Nigg, and Lohr (1992) conducted a study to explore splitting and malevolence in borderline patients' ratings of their parents. Participants were inpatient females classified into groups of borderlines, depressives, and schizotypals. Subjects were administered the Diagnostic Interview for Borderlines (DIB) and the Adjective Check List (ACL). Seven of the ACL scales were studied to measure the ratings of the following parental attributes and thus the affective quality of object representations: Favorable,

Unfavorable, Critical Parent, Nurturing Parent, Nurturance, Aggression, and Dominance. Of the 31 patients with borderline personality disorder, 24 reported a history of childhood sexual abuse.

In general, the abused patients rated their parents as more negative on the negative scales, and as less positive in general on all the scales. Correlations between mothers and fathers on the Favorable scale were significantly lower among the abuse patients and the borderline group than the other two groups.

The researchers concluded that the abused patients and patients with borderline personality disorder did not separate mothers and fathers into a good and a bad parent, though they were significantly less likely than comparisons to portray both parents as good, thus reflecting their malevolent perceptions of the object world.

In a similar finding, Heller (1990) administered the BORRTI and conducted a semistructured interview with 45 adult women inpatients at a private psychiatric hospital. Subjects who had experienced sexual abuse were more likely to describe their fathers as less benevolent, or affectionate, again reflecting the malevolent object representations.

In the qualitative study by Kinzl and Biebl (1992), the affect tone of inpatient women was assessed through clinical interviews. These women experienced an internal world characterized by feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and powerlessness. Further, the mother representation was viewed as weak and unable to protect the child. The investigators concluded that the perceived lack of social support and affectional bonds, as well as an anticipation of abandonment, contributed to pathological ego functioning.

Relatedness/Intimacy Level of Object Relations

The third dimension pertains to the capacity to establish intimate relationships. The capacity for relatedness and intimacy is theorized to be a manifestation of mature and healthy object relations development and functioning. Healthy development fosters in a child the capacity for emotional investment in relationships where others are valued for their unique attributes rather than for self-centered gratification. At a mature level, one's wishes and impulses can be contained by the self in order to benefit others, or to serve a higher ideal or belief system. An immature level of object relations development is manifest in perceptions of others as a means to an end or agents of gratification, an inability to establish basic trust, and where there is an inability to have genuine empathy for the other.

Rorschach. In the study conducted by Leifer et al. (1991), the researchers performed thematic analyses of the Rorschach protocols of sexually abused and non-abused girls using the MOA scale. Results indicated that more disturbed perceptions of interpersonal contacts were evident among the abused girls, as reflected in median scores on this scale. No differences between the groups were found on the HORS, the single most adaptive score, whereas significant differences were noted on the LORS, the most disturbed score. Studies have shown that the capacity to produce a more adaptive HORS reflects the capability for socially conventional behavior, whereas the LORS has been consistently correlated with independent measures of disturbed relationship patterns and impaired reality testing (Blatt et al., cited in Leifer et al.). The results suggest that although sexually abused girls are capable of socially appropriate behavior their internal models of relationships show disturbance.

Thematic Apperception Test. As previously discussed, DeSousa (1993) explored the intimacy and relatedness of object relations of sexually abused girls using the ORSCS. In this study, abused girls scored significantly lower on the Capacity for Emotional Investment In Relationships and Moral Standards Scale (CEI), and were more likely to give Level-1 responses on this scale than non-abused respondents. These findings suggest that this sample of sexually abused girls may have a greater tendency to treat others as ends rather than as means, consider primarily their own need gratification, and have more primitive moral standards than non-abused girls.

Thode (1994) also studied the object representations of sexually abused girls in comparison to those of a clinical control group with no history of maltreatment. In addition, girls subjected to sexual abuse only were compared with girls who were sexually abused in conjunction with physical abuse and/or neglect (i.e. multiply abused). Subjects included 28 sexually abused female children, 24 multiply abused female children, and a control group of 24 children with no documented history of abuse ranging in age from 6 to 16-years. Sexual abuse was defined as a wanted or unwanted sexual experience with an individual at least five years older including both contact and non-contact events. TAT stories were analyzed using the ORSCS. While the results did not support predictions concerning group differences as a function of abuse, the sexually abused girls showed a non-significant trend toward more severe impairment in their CEI scores. Further, the results showed no discriminative power for the sexually and multiply abused groups, however there was a trend toward discriminating the non-abused group from the total abuse group on percentage of Level-1 scores on all scales of the ORSCS. The combined sexual and multiple

abuse group showed a slight tendency toward higher frequencies of Level-1 responses manifested primarily along the dimension of CEI.

Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory. In a study of intimacy and relatedness, Riederle (1994) explored the object relations of sexually abused women using the object relations scales of the BORRTI. To assess the nature and quality of object relations, the researcher also used four other measures to explore the capacity for intimacy and relatedness.

The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) was developed by Descutner and Thelen (cited in Riederle, 1994) to assess fear of intimacy which is defined as "the inhibited capacity of the individual, because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued (Descutner & Thelen, cited in Riederle). The instrument is intended to assess intimacy in close, heterosexual dating relationships by examining the extent to which personal information is shared, the emotional valence associated with that shared information, and the level of regard for the other (Descutner & Thelen, cited in Riederle). The measure consists of 35 I-statements with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale. High scores indicate a high fear of intimacy. High internal consistency and test-retest reliability ($r = .89$, $p < .001$) were reported (Riederle).

The Risk in Intimacy Inventory (RII) (Pilkington & Richardson, cited in Riederle, 1994) is a 10-item scale designed to measure the perception of risk associated with intimacy. Higher scores represent higher levels of perception of risk. Formal norms for the RII have not yet been established. In this study, respondents were asked to complete the inventory twice. Once for relationships in general, and once for a specific intimate relationship with a man.

The Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) was developed by Miller and Lefcourt (cited in Riederle, 1994) to assess intimacy in different types of interpersonal relationships, such as friendship or marriage. Seventeen intimacy items measure the frequency with which the respondent confides in others, expresses affection, has disagreements, lends support, and feels close to an other. The measure also assesses the degree of importance the respondent attributes to the relationship (Waring, 1985, cited in Riederle). High scores reflect high levels of intimacy.

The Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale (SITS) was developed by Johnson-George and Swap (cited in Riederle, 1994) to measure different aspects of interpersonal trust the respondent reports in relation to a specific other, particularly in intimate, interpersonal relationships. Scale items measure the degree to which others are trusted with the respondent's material possessions, personal confidences, physical safety, and the extent to which others are perceived as dependable or reliable. High scores indicate high trust.

In this study, father-daughter incest was defined to include any sexual experiences between the female child and the adult male who had been functioning in a paternal role. Sexual relations referred to sexual body contact and included sexual kissing and hugging, fondling of genitals and/or breasts, digital penetration, oral-genital contact, and attempted and completed vaginal or anal intercourse (Riederle, 1994). Intimacy was defined as a multicomponent process characterized by mutual self-disclosure of personally relevant facts and feelings, as well as other aspects of the self. Intimacy was also characterized by the validation of one another's experiences, mutual trust, feelings of closeness, caring and affection, and an attitude of non-possessive acceptance of the other person as an individual independent from oneself (Riederle). In romantic

relationships, intimacy also included the expression of physical and sexual intimacy between lovers. Intimacy functioning refers to an individual's ability to be intimate with another person as specified above (Riederle).

Participants in this study were 78 adult female survivors of paternal incest between the ages of 20 and 62. Respondents were non-randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions, depending on the father figure by whom they were sexually abused in childhood. Group 1 consisted of 58 adult women sexually abused by biological fathers who lived in the family home since their daughters' birth and at least until age 2. Group 2 consisted of 20 adult women sexually abused by non-biological father figures, including stepfathers and adoptive or foster fathers, who entered the home when the respondents were at least 2-years-old. A between-groups quasi-experimental design was used to examine any differences between the groups on results of the object relations and intimacy measures.

No significant differences between group means emerged on any of the four BORRTI object relations scales. However, scores for both groups on these scales were elevated into the pathological range established by Billington and Bell (cited in Riederle, 1994). Further, there were no significant differences between groups on the FIS, RII, or SITS, though these scores also were significantly higher than non-abused comparison norms.

The fact that both groups of abused women scored in the pathological range on all object relations measures suggests that paternal incest had a devastating and long-lasting impact on survivors' interpersonal functioning, regardless of the perpetrator's status as biological or non-biological parent (Riederle, 1994). Results reflected a tendency for survivors to feel alienated and distrustful in their relationships, and further suggested difficulty in maintaining

adequate self-other boundaries (Billington & Bell, cited in Riederle). These individuals also exhibited a high degree of insecure attachment, which suggests they are sensitive to rejection, fear abandonment, lack a mature level of autonomy, and have a lowered capacity to invest in intimate relationships. Subjects likely fear and avoid intimate interactions with the opposite sex, and they may experience sexual problems. Also, responses of these individuals reflected a greater degree of egocentricity in relationships which perhaps is manifest in a tendency to manipulate others for their own aims (Billington & Bell, cited in Riederle).

One non-significant trend emerged on the SITS wherein scores for both groups approached the range indicative of the capacity to establish a moderate amount of trust in one specific male person. Although the women in these two samples were apparently able to trust the specific man to whom they felt emotionally closest, they still manifested difficulty with object relations and intimate relationships in general. Indeed, their object relations scores indicated problems with boundaries and autonomy, as well as alienation and egocentricity.

Two major methodological issues must be considered in the interpretation of these results. First, the non-biological comparison group was relatively small ($\underline{n}$ = 20), which may have limited the strength of this study. Second, at time of testing, women in this study had undergone an average of 6 years of therapy, much higher than the average for many sexual abuse survivors, which may mean participants were relatively advanced in their recovery. As a result, intimate object relating which was likely originally experienced as painful, abusive, and evocative of fear and distrust, may have become infused with a modicum of trust via a healing therapeutic relationship. These factors limit the generalizability of these results (Riederle, 1994).

Frank (1992) also explored the correlation between sexual abuse and disturbances in interpersonal aspects of object relations functioning by comparing individuals who had been sexually abused as children with individuals who reported early sexual experiences with same age peers. Participants were 100 women ranging in age from 17 to 21-years-old who were recruited from an undergraduate psychology course at a large, private university in the northeastern U.S. Of the respondents, 50 women reported sexual experiences during childhood that met the criteria for inclusion in the abuse group (i.e., sexual activity with someone who exceeds the subject's age by at least 5 years). A sexplay comparison group of 50 women was selected randomly from the remaining subject pool that had been matched for age and SES. Women in the comparison group indicated some type of mutual sexual activity with peers (age difference less than 5 years) prior to age 14.

Respondents were tested in groups of 50 and were administered the TAT, the BORRTI, and asked to complete the Sexual Experiences Survey. The childhood Sexual Experiences survey is embedded within a larger survey of childhood sexual victimization first developed by Finkelhor (1979; for a review see Finkelhor, 1986), and was modified for this study to include information about sexual experiences prior to the age of 14. Five TAT cards (1, 2, 3BM, 4, 13MF) were projected one at a time on an overhead screen for 5 minutes, and participants were instructed to write a brief paragraph in accordance with typical TAT administration procedures. Subjects then completed the BORRTI and Sexual Experiences Survey. Factor scores were generated for each of the 7 BORRTI subscales for each subject; TAT responses were scored for affect tone of relationships in accordance with the ORSCS. Interrater reliability was checked at intervals of each 10 or 20 protocols, and ranged from r = .70 to r = .93. Final

summary score was obtained for TAT by averaging the individual card scores for each subject.

Whereas no significant group differences were demonstrated for the summary TAT score, several of the BORRTI subscale factor scores were significantly different between the abuse and sexplay comparison groups. Specifically, the BORRTI profiles of the abused participants suggested a profound sense of disconnection and emptiness in relationships (ALN, M = -0.13, SD = 0.68) coupled with deep fears of abandonment and unmet yearnings for nurturance (IA, M = 0.61, SD = 0.80), and a self-protective and exploitive view of relationships (EGC, M = 0.09, SD = 0.73). The demonstration of significant group differences on 3 of the 4 BORRTI scales and 2 of 3 reality testing ego function scores suggests that women who experience sexual abuse prior to adolescence may develop a severely impaired pattern of viewing and relating to the object world (Frank, 1992). Women who tend to view the object world as destructive and threatening seem to experience difficulties in establishing intimacy, and may feel isolated and insecure in relationships with others.

While this study attempted to address some of the methodological problems in assessing the sequelae of sexual abuse on object relations, there were some factors that limit the interpretation of results. The academic achievement level of these respondents is not indicative of all sexual abuse victims. Further, the investigator notes that the ORSCS scoring system may be insensitive to subtle variations that might be seen in a relatively high functioning population (D. Westen, personal communication, cited in Frank, 1992), thus limiting the applicability of this tool to college students.

Silbert (1993) also used the BORRTI to measure participants' sense of relatedness in a sample of sexually abused women. In this study, the mean scores

of the abused respondents were compared to BORRTI group norms provided by Graham-Bermann & Cutler (cited in Silbert) from a study conducted at the University of Michigan. The comparison group consisted of 18 female undergraduates students. Responses of the abused respondents indicated their sense of relatedness was significantly less than that of the norm group (M = 0.4693, SD = 0.1647 abused; M = 0.314, SD = 0.110 non-abused, t = 5.16, $p < .001$).

The results obtained in this study support the hypothesis that women sexually abused as children develop a generally poor sense of relatedness compared to non-sexually abused women. Abused women's scores on the object relations scale of the BORRTI suggest that sexually abused women may feel more socially incompetent, more alienated from others, more insecure in their attachments to others, and tend towards greater egocentricity than non-abused women. The researcher suggested that this study lends support to the idea that object relations may be malleable after early childhood (Silbert, 1993). The fact that a group of sexually abused women, not all of whom were sexually abused during infancy or early childhood, performed poorly on these object relations measures raises the issue of whether events occurring during middle or late childhood can have a formative impact on object relations.

Panucci (1992) utilized attachment theory as a conceptual basis for assessing 52 adult females who had experienced incest during their childhood. The study was designed to determine the relationship between the incest experience and the association with participants' object relations and other related factors. The BORRTI was utilized along with an objective questionnaire to assess the level of relatedness in participants' object relations. A majority of participants demonstrated pathological levels of responses to the ALN and IA scales. For

participants who had been in psychotherapy, therapy helpfulness was negatively associated with degree of alienation.

Reagan (1993) used a non-empirical, multiple case study approach to examine the effects of mother-daughter sexual abuse on victims' general psychological functioning and on specific maturational processes. Participants were 7 female volunteers who were at least 18 years of age and who reported a history of childhood sexual abuse by their biological mothers. These women reported no abuse history by any other perpetrator. The MMPI-2 and BORRTI were utilized, and data were aggregated and analyzed with an emphasis on the identification of trends, processes, and relationships across a majority of the sample. On the BORRTI measures, participants had elevated scores on the ALN and IA scales. The researcher concluded that mother-daughter sexual abuse significantly impacts the development of relational styles which are characterized by extreme anxiety about attachment and rejection.

Other Measures. Elliott (1994) conducted a study that used an object relations perspective to examine the long-term effects of sexual abuse on the interpersonal relationships of professional women. Women were categorized as having a sexual abuse history if they described sexual contact (ranging from fondling to intercourse) before the age of 16 and if the contact was with someone 5 or more years their senior, or the contact occurred against the will of the subject regardless of the perpetrator's age.

Participants included a stratified random sample of 2,963 professional women, with 32.4% indicating a history of sexual abuse. In a self-administered questionnaire, respondents completed the Object Relations Scale of the Ego Functioning Assessment Questionnaire (Hargrove, cited in Elliott, 1994), followed by the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, cited in Elliott). The Object

Relations Scale was used to assess the level of impairment in respondents' capacity for interpersonal relationships. This scale assessed the capacity to establish basic trust in relationships, the ability to perceive and relate to others independent of oneself (establishment of boundaries), and the extent to which present relationships are characterized by reciprocity and flexibility and are free from the maladaptive patterns found in early childhood experiences. The Family Environment Scale assessed characteristics of the family of origin such as structure and organization of the family, the degree of interpersonal support, and the self-sufficiency and autonomy of family members.

Six aspects of object relations were identified through factor analysis as variables measured by the Object Relations Scale. The most global factor, Interpersonal Discomfort, includes items suggestive of difficulties in bonding with another person. Interpersonal Hypersensitivity includes statements suggestive of fear of abandonment and hypersensitivity. The next three factors focus on specific interpersonal relationships and include Relationship with Lover, Relationship with Mother, and Relationship with Father. The final factor was Maladaptive Interpersonal Patterns. In this study, scores on the Relationship with Mother factor were the most predictive of a sexual abuse history among the six factors and the total score.

Women who had experienced sexual abuse reported significantly more interpersonal difficulties than the non-abused women in this sample as assessed by these object relations measures. The results suggest that sexual abuse has a profound effect on the capacity for object relatedness, and this finding was independent of family dysfunction variables (Elliott, 1994). The investigator also concluded that abuse survivors have trouble altering hurtful interpersonal patterns as indicated by the data. Maladaptive Interpersonal Patterns factor was

highly discriminating between individuals with and without an abuse history. When appropriate boundaries are not established and maintained early in life, difficulties in both starting and ending relationships can occur, even when the relationship is unsatisfying or perhaps even destructive. Women who perceived the abuse as particularly traumatic were the most impaired in their capacity for object relations (Elliott). As stated previously, Relationship with Mother was the most predictive factor of a sexual abuse history in this sample of women. Perhaps an early deficit in object relations is replicated in the abusive relationship. Alternatively, it may be that sexual abuse is such a traumatic event that the internal representation of the primary caretaker cannot protect or assuage the damage. In this case, the internal mother representation might be viewed as ineffective at best, and abandoning and abusive at worst.

Perceptual Accuracy of Object Relations

The final dimension of object relations reviewed is perceptual accuracy. This aspect of functioning refers to an individual's ability to make accurate, complex, and logical attributions of others' behaviors and motives. At a mature level of object relations development there is understanding of cause-effect phenomena, and attributions are realistic and logical. At a less developmentally mature level, attributions may be illogical or inaccurate, have distorted cause-effect reasoning, and be unrealistic.

Rorschach. DeSousa's (1993) study of the object relations of sexually abused girls also examined the accuracy of object perceptions using the DACOS scores on the Rorschach protocols. Blatt et al. (1976) found differences in the way that pathological and normal individuals embellish Rorschach responses. More disturbed individuals tend to embellish inaccurate representations more often than healthier individuals, and healthy individuals tend to embellish accurate

representations more often than disturbed. Thus, the researcher predicted that abused girls would score lower on the various DACOS measures for Accurate responses, and higher on the measures for Inaccurate responses, than non-abused girls. Results from this study revealed only one statistically significant difference between groups on the DACOS measures. Sexually abused girls' scores were higher than non-abused girls on the Motivation subscale with inaccurate responses, indicating greater representational pathology. The researcher concluded that abused girls are likely to attribute inaccurate or pathological motivations to the interpersonal scenarios they perceive. The researcher cautioned that these conclusions are tentative since the appropriateness of using the DACOS with children is yet to be determined. To use these scales, a protocol must have H and HM responses, and in this study some did not.

Thematic Apperception Test. In examining the results of the TAT analyses in this study, DeSousa (1993) also showed that abused girls scored significantly lower on the Understanding of Social Causality Scale (USC) and were more likely to give Level-1 responses than the non-abused participants. The researcher suggested that abused girls are less likely than non-abused to make accurate, logical, and appropriately complex attributions about the causes of people's actions, thoughts, and feelings. Further, these attributions are not likely to be psychologically minded (DeSousa, 1993).

Other Measures. In Frank's (1992) study, the investigator found elevations on the reality testing subscales of the BORRTI and suggested that the abused individuals also may experience intense ambivalence and confusion about their perception of both internal and external reality (UP, M = 0.28, SD = 0.74). This confusion and anxiety may be alleviated by idiosyncratic beliefs and dissociative experiences (RD, M = 0.06, SD = 0.76).

Reagan (1993) also found that women who had been sexually abused by their biological mothers demonstrated reality testing deficits characterized by chronic doubts about personal perceptions of internal and external states as indicated by scores on the BORRTI.

In their study with sexually abused children, Stovall and Craig (1990) found significant differences in self representations between the abused participants and the non-abused comparison group. The researchers noted that the object relations scales were more sensitive in assessing unconscious perceptions of the self and other than the Piers' Harris Scale. While the non-abused group had congruent conscious and unconscious perceptions of self and other, abused participants had more negative unconscious perceptions of self and others whereas their conscious perceptions of others were more positive.

Conclusion

Sexual abuse represents an extreme violation of the victim's psychological, emotional, and physical sense of self. Often, abuse occurs within the context of a relationship where a bond of trust may be traumatically exploited or severed. The recently published body of literature pertaining to the impact of sexual abuse on object relations is beginning to investigate the ramifications of abuse on the internal world. While there are many limitations and variables that cannot be controlled, some trends emerge in these studies pointing to the types of object relations deficits and disruptions resulting from abuse.

Sexual abuse appears to hinder the structural development of object relations. The differentiation of self from other and the developmental awareness of others as separate with unique and complex characteristics are two processes that seem prone to disruption in the sequelae of sexual abuse. Further, victims'

affective worlds seem to be largely colored by malevolent expectations. Others are perceived as hostile and threatening, and these affective experiences are internalized and incorporated into the object representations. The affective component of the internal object world also infiltrates, and actually contextualizes, real relationships with others. Often, there are maladaptive interpersonal patterns that repeat across relational contexts. Intimacy and trust are tenuous at best, and often absent. Sexual abuse also appears to distort perceptions about self and others. Victims may develop idiosyncratic thought processes in an attempt to make sense of the abuse experience. The interaction of these components of internal experience can create an isolative and painful external world that characterizes the state of these internal processes.

The interdependent nature of these aspects of object relations functioning causes the topic of study to be necessarily complex. The studies discussed herein represent good attempts to operationalize what is often difficult to define and understand. More research is needed to further assess the sensitivity and validity of the measures currently available; thus far, these tools provide a strong foundation for continuing the exploration of the internal world. Though challenging, an understanding of the internal structure and processes of the object relations of sexual abuse victims will establish clinical bases for reparative and progressive clinical treatment.

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